

TITLE: Life's Big Fight

DATE: January 22, 2017 (Oakmont)

SERIES: Stick Your Neck Out - Part 4 (Break Me)

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; John 12:23-27; Luke 22:19-20; 2 Timothy 4:5-8; James 1:2-4

BIG IDEA: God perfects us when he breaks us.

THEME: Brokenness, Purpose, Strength in Weakness, Control, Dying to Self

Introducing first.... from the red corner. Weighing 200... 180 pounds, he hails from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was rated by many, as the best pound for pound fighter of the last decade. With 52 wins, 38 of them coming by the way of knockout, and only 4 defeats. He is the current HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD, DAVID "THE LIONHEART" LONGSTRETH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

And fighting in the blue corner weighing more than care to say and so big and intimidating at times our heavyweight champion wants to run and hide... with countless wins by knockout—former heavyweight champion of the world...

Life...

Because right now you're sitting out there and you're looking at my life—and I want you to know that you are a spectator to an incredible event called Life's Big Fight. Because life isn't easy—it will hit you hard at times and at times its hard to keep on going. It will break you down and bust you up.

And when I walk up to my opponent at the start of the match—my opponent looks down upon my frail, fragile little body and says very clearly... I must break you!

And when I look out across this room today, I know that if I look long enough at any one of you—I am also a spectator to your Life's Big Fight.

---

Fighting in Life's Big Fight takes guts! We've been talking about some of the gutsy kinds of prayers that Christians with Bold Faith pray (God, search me, God, sharpen me, God, send me, next week = God, show me). But of course I get one of the gutsy prayers that nobody wants to pray, ever... God... .. Break me!

Break me?! Can I call a timeout for a sec? Break me?! Are you kidding me?! How in the world am I ever supposed to convince any of us to pray such a dangerous prayer?!

Talk about gutsy prayers. This prayer is obviously the most difficult one to pray. I don't like this prayer. So often I refuse to pray it and when I feel God whispering to me to pray such a dangerous prayer—well its easy to just kind of ignore Him, pretend that my conscience isn't prodding me, pretend that I can't hear God inside my head saying, "if you want to be a follower with bold faith you'll start praying these kinds of dangerous prayers."

These kinds of dangerous prayers don't line up with the version of Christianity that is all about receiving a life of ease and comfort. But... these kinds of prayers have the potential to open your heart to the work of God in such a way that it can change your life forever.

I mean most of us want to be closer to God, right? We want the junk out of our lives. We want to be conformed into the image of Christ—which means that we want to be who God created us to be... But we really don't feel safe praying, "God, break me." The ironic thing here is that it's hard to imagine the blessing that's on the other side of the pain that this kind of prayer can bring.

Today we are using the metaphor of what the Apostle Paul calls the good fight and I'm calling this good fight Life's Big Fight. Because each of us has an audience watching our big fight—it's the main event—and we are surrounded by people in the seats, people in our corner of the ring and people in the other corner of the ring..

And to participate in this fight we need think of ourselves as athletes, as warriors. And to end up victorious in this big fight, we need to prepare ourselves to make it all the way to the end—by training like athletes. We are spiritual athletes, warriors of faith, and day after day even while we're in the fight, its really the training ground for Life's Big Fight.

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27... "All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. (Another version says, "I don't fight like a boxer beating the air.") I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified." — 1 Corinthians 9:25-27 NLT

"I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should." What do you think Paul means here? Does he mean that I need to develop a gym routine like James Harrison and spend \$350k/year on getting my body into peak physical condition—so that I can preach or lead worship? Not really thinking that's where he's going with this.

I think what Paul is saying here is discipline for the whole body (it includes the mind, it includes the heart, it includes the will and the spirit). And I say this because if you spend just 15 minutes seeking out the various places in the Scriptures that talk about the body, the heart, the mind, the soul—you'll see that there are Scriptures upon Scriptures that speak to us about the importance of maintaining and growing our whole selves.

Paul wrote that we should offer our bodies as living sacrifices and be transformed by the renewing of our minds or by the way that we think. Jesus said that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind. So it's the whole package that we must discipline and train. And one of the most effective ways of being disciplined and trained is by being broken. So...

What does it mean to be broken?

What happens when a young man or woman enlists in the service? They go to Boot Camp. And what happens at Boot Camp? They are broken. Because to become great warriors they must first be broken. What about the elite warriors, special forces? Even more breaking.

Olympians—break muscle, break comfort, break selfishness, break their bank accounts, maybe even break bones... The more that is broken; the more that is rebuilt... Put back together much stronger... a lean, mean, fighting machine.

And when that breaking down is reinforced by rebuilding with the right things—then the end result is strength. And when the rebuild has taken place after a serious breaking—a star is born, a super-athlete, a warrior—a champion is made.

What does it mean to be broken in our training for Life's Big Fight? It can be a long list of things... It could mean being broken by choices that we've made—bad choices—even good but difficult choices. It could mean being broken by choices that we didn't make or circumstances that were brought on by others or outside forces or "acts of God".

Being broken could also mean what the Apostle Paul says when he says that as Christ's followers we must daily take up our own crosses and die to ourselves—to our selfish desires, to our immorality, to our need for control.

Being broken also means that we trade in the lens that we see the world through—for God's lens—to see others as God sees others. To empathize with God over a broken and fallen world... To ingest the hurt and the pain that God feels over each life that is wayward, wasted or lost.

Even God's Son, Jesus Christ was broken. He had to be broken. He was broken by the great but difficult choices that He made. He was broken by the choices and circumstances that others had made.

He was broken by seeing the world—not only the world in His day—but the world from the very beginning all the way through to the very end... and we are part of that world that he saw. He saw the whole world's brokenness—our fallen, immoral and far from God condition—and that was the lens in which He viewed His life that led him to die on a cross in order to redeem and rebuild God's Kingdom in the way that God had intended it all along.

He was broken by dying to self, by literally taking up his own cross because that was the plan and he had trained for the big fight—to stay the course, to persevere through the pain and through death until new life awaited him on the other side.

In John 12:23-27 Jesus talks about what it is to die to self when he says this... "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. Anyone who wants to serve me must

follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me. “Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came!” - John 12:23-27 NLT

So as followers of Christ and as children of God our Creator, we too are to be broken. That is His plan. We are to be broken in order to be strong so that we can complete this life victorious. To cross the finish line, to still be standing when the bell rings at the end of the last round—to then stand before God and receive the eternal prize that awaits all who are victorious. So I ask each of you today this question...

What needs to be broken in your life?

What is it about you that needs to be broken? So that you can become a champion, a warrior, a star? God wants all of us to be champions in Life’s Big Fight—He didn’t create us to be losers—He created us to be winners! And God also gave us a huge advantage—and that is through His Son, Christ.

Christ is the greatest undefeated champion who will never be beaten. And God gave each of us this champion, Christ, who now stands in the corner of the ring in our big fight. How did Christ become the number one undefeated champion of the universe? He started by training, by discipline, by praying gutsy prayers. We see such a prayer leading to his big fight on the night he was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He was about to enter a very painful and difficult season and He knew the plan. So he spent quite some time in prayer, praying so hard that he sweat drops of blood, praying that if there were another way to be victorious then let it be... and then he resolved to what had to happen—a prayer to be broken. We see this prayer in Mark’s gospel account of that night, Mark 14:36... “Father,” Jesus said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” — Mark 14:36 NIV

And just hours before that prayer—he had dinner with his disciples and he told them that he had to be broken and poured out. He knew this had to be the way—that the prize which awaited on the other side of this fight would be worth it all. Luke gives the account of that conversation in his Gospel, chapter 22... “And Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” — Luke 22:19-20 NIV

So here He was about to enter the round that would take him down but not take him out. His death on the cross was the round that the world thought themselves victorious until the counting began... 1, 2, 3! Three days and up He rose with a final knockout punch—the fight of all fights was now over and the Champion rose up from the grave to defeat all enemies for all time!

Christ was broken... but in His brokenness he became more powerful than one could ever imagine—the power to break sin and erase the blemishes of every one of us—for even at our best—our hands are so dirty that we could not clean them on our own no matter how hard we tried or how many good things we could accomplish!

And now this Champion stands in the corner of our ring and he cheers us on. He guides us, he gives us strength and ambition, courage and power to stand in the ring... to take the punches, to get beat down but get back up again... to outlast our opponent, to wear the world down instead of being worn down by the world, and ultimately to finish the fight a champion like He is!

Christ is here to turn brokenness into redemption, to turn brokenness into strength, to turn brokenness into victory. What is it about you that needs to be broken so that you can become a champion? I can't answer that for you. Maybe it's pride, maybe it's distrust, maybe selfishness, or maybe you just need to be broken so that he can bless you in unknown and unexpected ways.

God doesn't break us to cause undue pain and suffering. He doesn't allow us to be broken because He doesn't love us enough. On the contrary. He breaks us and allows us to be broken often to bless us. He allows those pieces that hinder our growth and block His work to be broken down so that we can have true life. Sometimes God targets areas of our lives that we are unwilling to submit to Him. And the tighter the grip that we have on these areas, the more difficult the struggle and the breaking.

So I can't tell you what areas of your life need to be broken or which areas God has already broken for you or allowed circumstances to play out in order that you would be broken. But I can tell you to go with it—don't run from it, don't rebuke God for it, don't always choose the easy path instead of the right path.

When you're being broken or after you've been broken—I challenge you to thank God for it and ask Him to rebuild you. A stronger version of your former self, a more mature and godly version—a lean, mean, fighting machine—ready to take on life.

What will it look like for you to be broken?

The downside? To name just a few possibilities... Loss... Hurt... Anxiety... Loneliness... Uncertainty... Disappointment... Fear...

Oh But The Upside! To name just a few possibilities... Unexpected good... True joy... Freedom... Strength... Character... Maturity... Gratitude... Purpose...

And I find that whole mind-over-matter thing to be pretty right-on. Because if we get anxious about being broken—or scared of the difficult fights that lie ahead—it makes the anticipation almost unbearable and it magnifies the effects of the breaking.

On the flip side—if we muster up the courage to face it head-on, almost in a welcoming and inviting sense, then the process of that breaking isn't as bad to deal with. Paul knew this, he wrote to Timothy an encouragement to persevere through the fights ahead in 2 Timothy 4:5-8...

“But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you. As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.” — 2 Timothy 4:5-8 NLT

I want to also say this—if you look back on your life and you see seasons of brokenness that you've not really dealt with properly—steer that brokenness in the right direction. Let that brokenness make you stronger! Let it make you a champion!

We all have seasons of brokenness that lie ahead of us. Feel your pulse right now. Is your heart beating? If it is then I can pretty much guarantee you that you'll experience seasons of brokenness ahead. Maybe not tomorrow or the next day, but soon enough the season will roll into your life and beat you down.

Because life is life. Life hits us hard at times—harder than we can even imagine—especially when everything is going just fine. And then at some point life beats us to our knees, it's just a matter of time. Preparing for the big fight, even welcoming it...that's the stuff of champions, not the stuff of cowards...

Video: Rocky Balboa Clip (2m 18s)

“God, break me” is a very dangerous prayer... yes—but it's more dangerous to the forces who fight to take us down and knock us out. Because the prayer, “God, break me” is going to give God full access to shape us into who He made us to be.

“God, break me” is a prayer that will allow us to fulfill our purpose in life, to be the best version of ourselves, to be champions of faith, to conquer this life and to stand victorious at the very end. I guess you could say that God perfects us when He breaks us.

You don't have to pray the actual words, “God, break me” to be broken. This message today isn't just giving us a few words to say in a routine of spiritual practices. “God, break me” is an attitude that we choose.

“God, break me” is the prayer that we often say when we pray for God's will to take place in our lives. Because when we let go and give up control of the various things that we are or that we have—we are saying that we trust God and we are allowing Him to let His will play out no matter what may happen.

And for us to be ok with that—knowing that God’s will isn’t about our comfort and safety; but instead, it is about living this life worthy that He has created and intended for us—that... takes bold faith.

“God, break me...” Now that’s the gutsy prayer of someone with bold faith. Would you bow your hearts...

#### PRAYER

God, break me...

I’m afraid to pray it, or at least I thought I was afraid. But then I think about how much I trust you. I know that you have my best interest in mind. I know that you created me, that you have a plan for me and a purpose for my life. Who am I to know what I want for my life? Who am I to get in the way of Your will?

So humbly, I bow my heart before you in a very honest, open and transparent moment. And from the deepest part of my will, I ask you, God... Let your will be done in my life completely—no matter what has to take place.

And would you help me to stand now—all the way through to the very end—a champion... Victorious because you were present... Victorious because you had control... Victorious through your Son, Christ, in whose name I pray... Amen.

#### BENEDICTION

James 1:2-4 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.